

THE USE OF TOP-DOWN APPROACH IN TEACHING LISTENING THROUGH SHORT STORIES

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Abstract

Listening comprehension is the first skill that students should master, because before someone understands and starts to speak, he or she has to hear sounds, words, or speech pattern. Listening is considered as a difficult language skill since it involves some aspects of the language, for example; vocabulary, understanding the sound, grammar, getting the main idea, specific information and reference. The teaching of listening in formal schools is still considered unsuccessful for that it tends to make students boring. Therefore, English teachers should provide more challenging and interesting listening activities. Teaching listening with short stories is said to be one of the way to reduce students' boredom and to increase students listening comprehension.

For the above reasons, this research was intended to find out whether there was significant improvement of students' listening comprehension in short stories after being taught through top-down approach. This research was done in a group pretest posttest design. The population of this research was the eleventh grade in SMA YP UNILA Bandar Lampung. The sample of this research was XI IPA 1 and was selected by using random sampling technique. In collecting the data, the researcher administered the pretest, the treatments and posttest. The data was analyzed by using repeated measure t-test. In which the significance was determined by $p < 0.05$. The result of t-test computation showed that t-ratio was higher than t-table ($t_o > t_{table}$) that is, ($29.330 > 2.021$), it can be concluded that there was a significant improvement of students' listening comprehension after being taught short stories through top-down approach. This means that teaching listening through short stories in a top-down approach was applicable to improve students' listening comprehension ability.

Keywords: Short stories, listening comprehension, top down approach.

1. Introduction

The objectives of English language teaching stress on four language skills mastery; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Krashen (1982) in Yufriyati (2001:63), listening is primary important in second language. In general, listening is considered as a difficult language skill to master. This is because listening involved some aspects of the target language, for example; vocabulary, understanding the sound, grammar, getting the main idea, specific information and reference. Listening is also very important for students to learn since it is one of productive skills, which is frequently used to convey the ideas in communicating with others. In fact, some

students have difficulties in listening comprehension, especially in identifying the main ideas, specific information, inference, and vocabulary.

Fisher and Terry (1980:138) proposed that teaching listening is not a simple thing either for elementary or senior high school students. Listening is better introduced as early as possible, because it is the first step of learning a foreign language. It is clear that listening is important in teaching learning activities. Nevertheless, we often find junior or senior high school students get difficulties in following the process of English teaching learning activity especially in listening. It is necessary for English teachers to make listening classes more interesting and motivating so that the students can make progress in listening

some students interested in a listening class. Just like Nunan (2005) who states that a challenge for the teacher in the listening classroom is to give learners some degree of control over the content of the lesson, and to personalize content so learners are able to get something about task.

There are numerous ways that will make listening become an interesting activity in teaching learning process, for example teaching listening through song, short story, plays, poem, jokes, anecdotes, and picture. It can be assumed that listening through short story will give the students new vocabularies and can also be as an alternative way of learning. Short stories provide the students with an interesting and motivating class situation that will help the students to learn effectively and improve their listening comprehension.

Stories are effective tools for early language teaching (Malkina, 1995:38). Story is the best vehicle for passing on information. It meets the emotional, cognitive, and psychological demands of children since it is interesting for them. Stories for students listening practice is considered simple story with familiar vocabularies. Charters (1983) defined short stories as prose narrative usually involving one connected episode or a sequence of related event. Teaching listening through short stories as listening material not only entertain the students but can also give the message and information to the students from a narrative of human relationship in life.

The idea of teaching listening is that listening activity should make use of students' prior knowledge in order to improve listening comprehension. According to Swift (2007:18) teaching listening suggest that people needs a way to make active approach to improve listening ability by focusing on the specific problem that students have planning listening activities to resolve the problem. The idea of prior knowledge is one part of the cognitive model of language processing. That model says that when people listen or read, they will process the information they hear both of top - down approach and bottom - up approach. The top-down approach sees understanding as starting from the listener's background knowledge of the non-linguistic context and of working down towards the individual sounds. Therefore, the researcher will use top - down approach in this research to encourage the students to listen for overall

understanding and to get the gist of the text, or being able to repeat back to the exact words used by the speaker.

Considering the background above, the researcher focused on teaching short stories to improve students' listening comprehension through top - down approach. This would be expected to help the students to improve their listening comprehension. The objective of this research is, therefore, to find out whether there is a significant improvement of students' listening comprehension after being taught short stories through top - down approach.

Listening Comprehension and Its Teaching

Listening plays a significant role in the language learning. It is evident that children listen and respond to language before they learn to talk. When it is time for children to learn to read, they still have to listen so that they gain knowledge and information to follow directions. According to Hughes (1991:134), there are two skills involved in the listening. They are macro skill and micro skill.

In macro skill, to understand what someone says, a listener has to involve with listening for specific information, obtaining gist of what is being heard or the listener should get the general idea of the information, following instructions or directions etc. In this study, the researcher focuses on the macro skill in terms of identifying the main idea, specific information, inference of the text, and vocabulary. Identifying the main idea of a text is one of the most important specific comprehension skills. Ophelia Hancock (1987: 54) defines that the main idea is the essence of the text, or rather what the speaker is trying to get across to the listener. In other words, that is what the speaker wants listener to know about. Therefore, the main idea is the important idea that the speaker develops throughout the text.

Supporting sentence or specific information develops the topic sentence by giving definition, examples, facts, comparison, analogy, cause and effect statistics and quotation. Kathleen (1986:31) states that an inference is an educational guess or prediction about something unknown based on available facts and information. The listener will be able to do this by making use of the context in which the word occurred, in order to give him a rough idea of its meaning. And the last, Vocabulary is the stock of

word used by the people or even person.

In micro skill, the listener has to interpret intonation pattern (e.g. recognize stress and rhythm), recognition of faction of structures (interrogative as request, imperative e.g. sit down! cohesive devices e.g. such as and which, detect sentence constituent e.g. subject, verb, object, preposition) recognizing discourse marker (e.g. well; oh; another thing is; now; finally). Traditionally, the students are required to concentrate on comprehension listening that is to understand the information they hear. In line with the statement above, Danaher (1994: 2) states that the macro skill of listening within foreign language learning is the most important skill for beginner students, in order to prepare them for speaking and later for reading and writing.

Implicitly, listening can be said as a process of getting and comprehending general idea or general picture of something that the students' heard. Therefore, comprehending information or ideas of what is being said is important. Malkina (1995: 41) states comprehension can be describe as that process which enables the receiver to make meaning from verbal and non-verbal information. Non verbal information may include background knowledge based on experience or visual information (metal pictures). According to James, (2006:1) listening comprehension refers to understanding the spoken language. Testing for listening comprehension must be grade level appropriate.

Listening comprehension refers to the ability to grasp general idea and to comprehend information from a spoken passage we hear. Since short story has familiar vocabularies, short story can creates good atmosphere that will enable the students to understand the information they heard and reduce their insecurities. Therefore, in this research, to suit with the students understanding of short stories, the researcher will refer to the lower level of listening comprehension to get general idea and to comprehend simple information that is explicitly states in a spoken passage told by the teacher.

Short Stories and the Top-down Approach

Larkin (2006:1) states that short stories are a form of short fictional narrative prose that tends to be more concise and to the point than longer works of fiction, novellas and novels. According to Hamilton and Weiss in Forest

(2007:3) stories are the oldest form of education. Stories capture the imagination, engaging the emotions and opening the minds of listeners. Short stories have its origin in the prose anecdote, a fast designed situation that comes rapidly to its point, with similarities in oral story telling traditions. Short stories shape miniatures forms of art according to the authors to its listeners.

In addition, Dautrope (2005:2) states the lengths of short stories are varied. It may range from short story of 500 words up to the long short story of 12,000 words, commonly 1,500-5000 words that has clear beginning, middle, and end. Usually a short story will focus only on one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters, and covers a short period. Miall (2002) summaries that short stories contain some aspect such as setting: time, place, environment, characterizations like change, traits, complexity (round, flat), structure plot: time, episodes, conflict, diction: discourse (direct, indirect, free indirect), style, figurative, allusive, symbolic; narrator: tone, point of view; omniscient/ limited omniscient/ participator, emotion: in story, reader, from form, point; interpretation, theme, moral. For this thing, learners have to focus on the component of the short stories. They have to know where the story happens, the characters are who involve in the story, and they have to concentrate the message of the story.

Swift (2007: 18) suggests that we need to take a more active approach to increase listening abilities in teaching listening. By focusing on the specific problems that the learners have and planning listening activities, it will help to solve the problems. There are two approaches involved in listening in Swift's ideas, Top-down Approach and Bottom up approach.

The top-down approach sees understanding as starting from the listener's background knowledge of the non-linguistic context and of working down towards the individual sounds. In top down process, the listener taps down into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or the context, the type of the text and the language. The background knowledge activates a set of expectations that helps the listeners to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. The top down process includes listening for the main idea. The main idea is the message the author or speaker is trying to say. Listen for the main idea is usually

found at the beginning of the listening passages. The main idea should provide the story is importance, and the lesson moral that can be learned from listen the story. Then, when people listen to a story, watch a film, or attend a lecture, they often predict what is coming next. In addition, it is the same case in a conversation. When they hear some signal words, they can predict the speaker wants to tell the reason, the purpose, the suggestion or a result, etc of an action. If the students carry this skill over to the listening of English, they will find that listening in English is not as difficult as they used to think. Predicting in listening makes the students play an active role in the process of listening comprehension.

Drawing inference is the activity of reaching an opinion from facts or reasoning. In people's daily life, people often use this listening skill to catch the speaker's real intention beyond their spoken utterances. If the listener makes an incorrect inference, it will lead to misunderstanding in communication. In addition, because of lack of target language environment, most of the time, the students have to learn to make inference by listening to the transactional conversations, monologues and passages. Drawing inference is to understand what the speaker suggests, who and where the speakers are, what they are talking about, and what their relationship to each other might be, what has just happened, what is going to happen, and so on. Summarizing is how we take larger selections of text and reduce them to their essentials: the gist, the key ideas, the main points that are worth noting and remembering.

The bottom-up approach sees comprehension as a matter of listeners first decoding (or understanding) the smallest elements of what they hear the element of the sounds. The listener relies on the language in the message that is combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. The bottom up process might include listening for specific detail, recognizing words order patter, and recognizing cognates. According to Wong (2005:4) way of treating the teaching and learning of listening by focusing on how to get the main ideas, the gist or the meaning in listening materials even when it is clear that learners have not been able to identify a lot of the speech sounds is often called the top-down processing approach. One very important idea for teaching listening activity has to make use of students' prior knowledge in order to

improve listening comprehension. Top down means using prior knowledge and experiences; they know certain things about certain topic and situations and use that information to understand. Top down approach on other hand refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of a message. Based on the frame of the theories above, the researcher assumes that top down approach in teaching listening short stories could be used to improve the students' listening comprehension in learning process.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In doing this research, the researcher conducted quantitative research based on the experimental method. She used one group pretest-posttest design. She used one class as the experimental class. The research was conducted to see whether there is a significant improvement of students' listening comprehension after being taught short stories through top down approach. The researcher conducted pretest, treatments, and posttest. The population of this research was the eleventh grade students of SMA YP Unila Bandar Lampung, which had eleventh classes. The researcher used two classes, one class as an experimental class (XI IPA 1) and another class as a try out class (XI IPA 2). Those classes were chosen by lottery. It was applied based on the consideration that every class in the population has the same chance to be chosen and in order to avoid the subjectivity in the research (Setiyadi, 2006: 39).

The instrument of this research is a set of listening comprehension test that was used for try out, pretest and posttest. Those tests were in the form of multiple choices. The multiple choices test was used since its marking is rapid, simple, and most importantly reliable, not subjective or influenced by the marker's judgment (Heaton, 1975).

A test could be said valid if the test measures the object that should be measured and suitable with the criteria. To measure whether the test has good validity, the researcher saw from the content validity and constructs validity. Content validity was the extent to which a test becomes representative sample of the subject matter contents. Construct validity was concern with the test, whether the test is actually in line with the theory of what it means to know the certain language knowledge skill, for example listening.

Since listening and reading are receptive skills, so both of them have the same purpose in comprehending the message while listening comprehends the oral message, reading comprehend the written messages. Therefore, the researcher used the same aspects of reading comprehension namely determining the main idea of the text, finding specific information of the text, inference, referencing and vocabulary in the test instrument.

To find out the reliability of the test, the researcher used split-half technique which requires her to split the test in two similar parts, first and second half (Hatch and Farhady, 1982: 246). To measure the coefficient of the reliability between first and second half, the researcher used Pearson Product Moment formula. Level of difficulty is the way to see how easy or difficult item is from point of view of the students who take the test. We conclude it by dividing the number of students who get it right by the total number of the students. The index of difficulty level (or facility value) of an item simply shows how easy or difficult the particular item proved in the test. Discrimination power is the extent to which the items differentiate between high and low level students on the test. The higher discrimination power the better it can be differentiating between upper and lower class. If the value is positive, it means that a large number of more knowledge students than poor students get the items correct. If the value is zero, it means no discrimination; it does not differentiate between upper class and lower.

The standard deviation is another way of showing the spread of scores. It measures the degree to which the group of scores deviates from the mean, it show all the scores are spread out and thus give a fuller description of test scores than the range, which simply describe the gap between the highest and lowest marks and ignore the information provide by all the remaining scores.

There are some steps that should be planned by the researcher. The researcher prepared a kind of test (called Try-out test) that was given to the students. She prepared the total number of test items and material that was tested. It used an objective test in form of 40 items in 90 minutes time. It was done in order to know the level of difficulty and discrimination power and to find out the reliability. The researcher prepared a kind of test (called Pre-Test) that was given to the students. The researcher used an objective test

in form of 30 multiple choices items in 90 minutes time. It was done to check the students' listening comprehension before treatments. Then, the researcher determined the material that should be taught to the students, of course, the material is about short stories. Each treatment was held for 90 minutes. And the last, the researcher prepared a kind of test (called Post-Test) that was given to the students. This aimed to measures the improvement of students' listening comprehension after they are taught short stories. The researcher used an objective test in form of 40 multiple choices items in 90 minutes time. It was done to find out whether there was any significant difference of students' listening comprehension after the treatments.

After that, the researcher applied the research procedure that had already been planned. In the first meeting, the researcher gave try-out test. The researcher administered the test papers to the students and asked the students to do the test and the last, she asked them to hand in their test. This test was in the form multiple choices that consisted of 40 items. The researcher gave pre-test. The researcher administered the test papers to the students and asked the students to do the test and last asked them to hand in their test. This test was multiple choices that consisted of 30 items. The researcher conducted the treatments consisting of three meetings. In each treatment, different short stories were presented. In the last meeting, the researcher gave post-test. The researcher administered the test papers to the students, asked the students to do the test, and then asked them to hand in their test. This test was multiple choices that consisted of 30 items.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The research was done to find out whether there is a significant improvement of students' listening comprehension after being taught short stories through top down approach. The research was conducted at the eleventh grade of SMA YP Unila Bandar Lampung. There were eleventh regular classes, and two classes were chosen randomly as the try out class and as the experimental class. Class XI IPA 2 was as the try out class and XI IPA 1 as the experimental class. The students were given forty items of multiple choices. The result shows that the reliability of the test is 0.97 and this can be said that the tests have a very high reliability. This indicates that this instrument would produce consistent result when

administered under similar conditions, to the same participants, and different time (Hatch and Farhady, 1982: 244).

The results of the pretest and posttest showed that by teaching short stories through top down approach the students' listening comprehension could be improved. From the previous explanation, it can be seen that the total score of pretest was 2230.5 and increased to 2883.6 in the posttest. It means that the score gained was 653.4. The mean scores of pretest was 55.75 and increased to 72.09 with gain was 16.34. Table 4 below provides students' mean scores of pretest and posttest.

Table 1. The Mean Score of Pretest and Posttest

Paired Sample Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post	Posttest	72.0900	40	9.43191	1.53396
Pre	Pretest	55.7550	40	7.12147	1.12605

From the table above, it was very clear that the students' listening comprehension increased after they were taught short stories through top down approach in teaching listening comprehension. The mean of the pretest 55.7550 and the mean of the posttest are 72.0900. To prove whether the data of result increased or not, the researcher used analysis of Repeated Measure T-Test. It is used to compare the data of t-test which is called t-ratio and t-table at the criteria level of significance. In this case, the researcher used the level of significant 0.05 and t-table 2.021. The result shows that t-ratio was higher than t-table ($29.330 > 2.021$).

Table 2. The Result of the Students' Listening Comprehension

Paired Samples Test									
			Paired Samples		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig. (1-tailed)	Sig. (1-tailed)
			Mean						
	Pre	Post	Mean	Std. Deviation					
Post	Posttest	72.0900	9.43191	1.53396	29.330	39	.000	.000	.000

From the result of t-test computation, we can see that t-ratio was higher than t-table ($29.330 > 2.021$) and with the level of significance is $p < 0.05$ and significance 2 tail is $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). It means that there was a significant improvement of students' listening comprehension after being taught short stories through top down approach.

The Improvement of Students' Score in the Aspects of Listening



From the result above, we can see that the highest aspect of listening was determining main idea and the lowest was inference. The result showed the improvement of each aspect of listening. It could be concluded that all aspects of listening students made improvement in teaching listening short stories through top down approach.

In this research, before conducting the treatments pretest was administered. From the pretest, we found out that the highest score was 70 while the lowest was 43.3, and the mean score was 55.75. In the treatments, the researcher explained about narrative text including the text purpose, the text organization, and genre of the narrative text. Rosa (2003) states that the stories and activities are all designed not only to educate students, but also to inspire, to involve, and to intrigue them. When the researcher pointed some students to tell their embarrassing moment, only one student who told the embarrassing moment because of to limited time. The students did not tell her embarrassing story in English but in Indonesian. Then the researcher showed a picture related to the short stories that they were going to listen.

The researcher asked the students what picture it was and what they knew in detail. This activity introduced the students to the short story, elicited or provided appropriate background knowledge to the students, activated the necessary schemata toward the story they were going to listen. Just like Rost (1994) states that the foreign language learners will use their schemata to predict the meaning of the words. Most of the students gave comments spontaneously, so the researcher needed to point at certain students. The students, who had been pointed, answered the questions loudly to the class in English but some of them still used Indonesian or English Indonesian. The researcher played the cassette and asked the students to find out the key word of the story to make the students easier in

understanding the short stories about. During the listening process, the students got only few unfamiliar words. The words were *appointment*, *honest* etc. The researcher guided the students to pronounce those words and told the meaning to the students. After that, the researcher played the cassette once again and asked the students to find the main idea of the story and to predict what the stories would be.

Besides that, the researcher asked the students to infer the setting, the role of the participant, and unstated details situation of the short stories. And then the researchers' played the cassette for the last and asks the students to make summary of the story and retell the short stories in their own sentence in oral form in order the other students to be able to listen the story that he or she told by choosing randomly. It means that after they listened to the story they could create their own style of story. At the end of the listening process, the researcher gave 10 questions to the students to evaluate the students. Those questions were in the form of multiple choices.

For the second treatment, the researcher gave the short stories with title "The Stonecutter". The students were still enthusiastic in listening to the story. The students felt curious because most of the students were not familiar with the story. In this session, the researcher did the same stapes as the first treatment. After listening to the story for the first time, most students were still confused about the story. The student only found out that the story was about the stonecutter who lived in the land. Even so, the students still paid attention and competed to ask few words that they did not understand. Like the words beneath, frustrated, and boulder. After the second listening practice, the students' comprehension got better. The students were able to answer the main idea and the question related to the story. In addition, the researcher found that the students were willing to come in front and told the story without being asked.

In the third treatment, the researcher did almost the same step to begin the class and gave a story with the title "Alberto's New Neighbors". At the first listening practice of the story of Alberto's New Neighbors, some students said that they were not unfamiliar with the story and vocabularies like, shouted, terrible, and replied. Then the researcher played the story again and wrote the difficult words so that students finally understood what the story was about and able to

retell the story. At the end of each treatment, the researcher asked the students to do some exercise based on the story and then discussed the answer together. Moreover, to help the students to understand more about the stories, the researcher gave text of each story.

From the atmosphere of the class during the research, it can be seen that the interesting listening materials made the students enjoyed their listening and those also encouraged them to listen the story until the end of the story even though during listening activity they found some difficult words or getting difficulties in inference of the story and interpreting some sentence that made them commit mistakes in doing listening comprehension test. They said that they learned listening in a different way especially through short stories. They did not feel bored because they enjoyed the learning process and got more motivation in listening class when they learned it through short stories. Various kind and appropriate short stories were necessary to make students more enthusiastic in doing listening activity because they will enter another adventure in learning English and new experience during listening class through short stories.

Morley (1996) states that we should vary the materials in terms of speakers' genre, age, dialect, accent, topic, speed, voice level and genre. The students enjoyed listening through short stories because they could also get new information from the story that they listen. Based on this fact, the statement of Zang Yi Zun (2005) that "the introduction of stories into English listening courses can improve students general morale, and show that the language is not just as a subject of study, but can be a source of enjoyment and recreation" is proven. Finally yet importantly, the difficulties found and the mistakes committed on their listening test did not make the students decrease from listening comprehension of short stories, the students did the next well in order they were able to know the whole of the story that they were able to know how that short stories ended. All of those activities affected the result of their listening comprehension of short stories, which were getting better from the first until the third stories.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the result and data analysis, there was a significant improvement of students' listening comprehension after being taught short stories through top down approach. It is proven by the increase of the students' mean score in posttest that was higher than the mean score in pretest. In experimental class, the mean score increased from 55.75 in pretest up to 72.09. In all aspects of listening, students made improvement by the teaching listening of short stories through top down approach. The highest aspect of listening was determining main idea and the lowest was inference. The result of the data showed the improvement of each aspect of listening. Short stories at the students' level can be interesting and close to real life and make the students enjoy listening comprehension activity. It can be seen from the students' enthusiasm in listening short stories given by the researcher. The interesting and a funny listening material also encourage the students to express their idea by using their own sentence related to the story they hear.

Since teaching short stories through top down approach can give better result for the students in listening comprehension, it is suggested for teachers to use short stories through top down approach in teaching listening comprehension. Since the lowest aspect of listening is inference, teachers should help the students to improve their ability in inference by giving more explanation on that aspect of listening and by practicing listen short stories. In teaching listening comprehension, it is advisable for teachers to use interesting and enjoyable materials in their classroom for that this motivates the students to learn English better.

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